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Tuesday 6 December 2016

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Mardi 6 décembre 2016

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

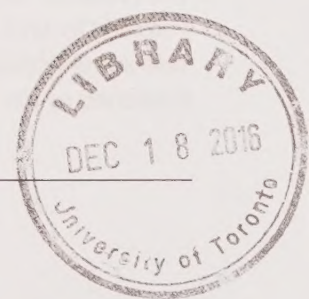
Intended appointments

Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Nominations prévues

Chair: Cristina Martins
Clerk: Sylwia Przedziecki

Présidente : Cristina Martins
Greffière : Sylwia Przedziecki



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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 6 December 2016

Mardi 6 décembre 2016

The committee met at 0902 in committee room 2.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to government agencies.

Before we begin our intended appointments review, our first order of business is to consider one subcommittee report. It is the subcommittee report for Thursday, December 1, 2016. Would someone please move adoption of the report? Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I move the adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, December 1, 2016.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. NITHY ANANTH

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Nithy Ananth, intended appointee as member, Consent and Capacity Board.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): We will now begin with the review of intended appointments. Our first intended appointment is Mr. Nithy Ananth—sorry if I did not pronounce that correctly. Please come forward and take a seat at the table. Mr. Nithy Ananth is nominated as member, Consent and Capacity Board. Thank you very much for being here this morning. You may begin with a brief statement, if you wish. Members of each party will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time used for your statement will be deducted from the government's time for questions.

You may begin.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Thank you, Madam Chair and respected members. I want to sincerely thank all of you for giving me this opportunity to present myself in front of you today.

The reason I applied for this position on the Consent and Capacity Board is quite personal to me. Since I was growing up as a child, two of my aunts, my dad's two sisters, had mental health issues. As a child, I know my own dad, my father, dealt with them to help them out: how to get treatment, how to get out of the situation. Since then, and also since I got married to my current

wife, she had a brother who was also affected by mental health issues.

I would say that for the most part of my life, I have seen, I have witnessed and I have also, on a very casual, voluntary basis, been involved with people who have been involved with mental health issues. It was always a passion for me to help people with mental health issues, to educate them and get them out of their situation. That's the personal side of the story.

There's also my extensive involvement in the community here in Canada for the last 26 years, since I have been here in Canada, and specifically in Ontario—being a member of a diverse community in this great province of Ontario. In some of our diverse communities, talking about mental health issues and mental health problems is a cultural stigma. I want to contribute in a very positive way to educate these communities on how to seek help and how to positively impact their situation, to get them out of their difficult situation, I would say.

Also, in my regular day-to-day profession, which I have been doing for the last 21 years, my involvement is extensively with public people. We counsel people on their financial planning needs, their financial needs and their financial situations. During my 21 years of experience in this day-to-day professional experience, we have come across numerous situations among our local communities, especially where I work and involve myself in the Golden Horseshoe—the Hamilton-Niagara—area. There are lots of situations where mental health issues are a big problem these days. Some of them don't know how to seek help and how to come out of their situations.

These are some of the personal experiences I have gone through over the past two decades or more. That's the reason I was passionate and very keen to get involved on this board, so that I can have a positive impact on our local communities.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much. We will now begin questioning with the official opposition. Mr. Cho?

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: First of all, thank you for applying for the position. You said to us why you are applying for this position. Once you get the appointment, do you see any change in the board? And how are you going to bring change so that the treatment program will get better?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I'm not here to change anything on the board, I would say. But at the same time, I will be

a positive input to the board, and also to impact on the mandate given to us as a board. If I'm given an opportunity, my contribution will be on a positive side, to make sure the board works in the interests of the people whom we are here to serve, and also to bring about a positive change.

I'm not here to change the way the board is working currently. I don't understand that that's my role here, as a new member of the board, if I'm given an opportunity.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay. Maybe I'll ask it a different way. What kind of contribution would you like to make as a new member?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: As I said, diverse communities are on the increase in this great province of Ontario. As I said earlier in my opening statement, talking about mental health issues and also problems which are affected by mental health issues, in some communities, is a cultural stigma, I would say. A person from a similar community, in our larger community—I would say that it will have a positive impact on those communities to come forward and seek the necessary help, which will also help the community at large.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay. Would you like to ask a question, or should I continue?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Sure.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'll leave off, Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Jim McDonell: You have a strong background in finance, business and cultural and community work. What can you bring to the board?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I would say that when I read and did some research about the board, I saw some budget deficits as well which have been experienced by the board in the last few years. So with my background in finance and business, I would say that—I don't know all the details at this current point, to be honest. But if I know the details, I can also contribute in such a way to see if we can save some wastages with what's happening and we can divert those. Resources are needed for this board, for sure. Mental health issues are on the increase in this province, so definitely resources are needed. At the same time, we have to wisely and properly use the resources so that the resources are used for the right reason, and to impact positively on the people who need them.

0910

Mr. Jim McDonell: The caseload is increasing significantly. Do you have any comment on what you might see with that—or how the schedules are getting tighter but the resources are not increasing? We see a huge increase in mental health cases around the province, but I know that in my riding, there are no psychiatrists available, and very few psychologists, if any. It really makes treatment very difficult.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I understand that. I work with a lot of psychiatrists and psychologists on a voluntary basis, casually, to help some of the community members to seek help. Obviously, I know that there are some shortages of psychiatrists, as you've said, and perhaps

psychologists as well in some of the communities. But at the same time, we have to try to see how best we can use the resources we have.

I know that our health care system is also in a difficult situation currently because of the lack of resources and also lack of skilled doctors. I don't know how much we can have an impact on those situations. But within the resources we have with some of our personal connections—I can definitely contribute in a positive way to get some help, which the community members need.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I was at a meeting in Cornwall where they were talking about a new mental health centre where they're bringing all of the services together. The chief of staff was bragging about how great a facility—and the first in the province, and how if anybody needed resources, they'd be there. One person in the crowd raised a hand and said, "Do you mean if I phone up tomorrow and I'm prescribed a psychiatrist, I can get one?" The answer was no. It just goes to speak of the problems we're having in this province. We've built the buildings, but there's nobody to man them. It's an area of 100,000 people.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Absolutely. I understand and I share your concern, respected member. There are some facilities available which are number one—they're some of the top facilities in the world—but sometimes there's not enough manpower to man them. I understand that, for sure. At the same time, I don't know, as a board, how much we can directly get involved or directly impact in solving some of those manpower issues when it comes to having more psychiatrists or psychologists.

My own son, who is a medical doctor, could not get into the medical system here in Canada. Today he is specializing in Brisbane, Australia, as an emergency care medical professional, and he's doing well. Initially, when he went, he said that after specializing he wanted to come back to Ontario, to Canada, but today he says that he likes Australia as well. Being a dad, I feel very sad that I have to visit Australia to see him.

That's the situation. I think we can't do it ourselves as a board. I think a lot of other places have to play a role as well—the Ontario Medical Association, Canadian Medical Association and all of the other places as well. Even at the Ministry of Health, the research that I have done so far because of my own son—they only have so much say how to rectify this physician shortage, to be honest.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Okay.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Two minutes left.

Mr. Jim McDonell: That's good.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): That's good? Thank you, Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning, sir. How are you?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Good morning.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to ask you a question right off the top, and then I'll get into some other things.

According to Elections Ontario records, you contributed more than \$4,000 to the Liberal Party of Ontario in 2014 and more than \$3,000 to the Liberal Party of Ontario in 2015. Part of your role as a member of the Consent and Capacity Board will be to act as an impartial and non-partisan judge of facts that are put in front of you.

Given your past donation records and affiliation with the Liberal Party of Ontario, are you now prepared to ensure that all your actions as a member of these boards not only are but also appear to be fully non-partisan?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Absolutely. I can assure you of that, respected member. As you know, we are in a free country, and obviously, we have freedom of choice and freedom of speech. Obviously, I might have supported a particular member or a particular political party. That doesn't mean that I only work with that political party or members belonging to that political party. I work across party lines. I even worked with the current official opposition in the Ontario Legislature, Mr. Patrick Brown. When I was working with the Canada India Foundation, he was part of the Canada-India parliamentary group. He had made many missions to India with some of our members, and I was part of that as well.

I can assure you, respected member, that my involvement will be on a totally non-partisan basis.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate your answer. Thank you.

Since 2008, the Consent and Capacity Board has seen—I think this is important, and talks a little bit to what you're talking about—a 53% increase in applications as well as a 73% increase in the number of hearings conducted. This is what's concerning.

However, during the same period, the budget for the board has stayed at pre-2006 levels, leading to a deficit of \$1.33 million in 2014-15. If this trend continues, will the board continue to be able to function properly, given the serious lack of cash?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I don't know all the details about the board's income and expenditure details at this current situation. But if I know more, with my finance background, I might be able to contribute in some ways to see if there is wastage in some area where we can cut down on some of the expenses, and then we can divert the resources where they are needed most.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate your financial background, but from what I've seen—including, you mentioned in the Golden Horseshoe, where I'm from—mental health is a crisis in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Absolutely.

Mr. Wayne Gates: When one in five people are living with mental health, we have a problem, and the problem is that we're hiding it in a corner instead of putting the proper resources into mental health.

Equally concerning is the growth within young people, our kids. In Niagara, I wouldn't call it quite a crisis, but we have a lot of young people that are committing suicide, which is obviously terrible. Some of that is, I believe, because of the pressure we put on some of our

children around education and their work and their lives, and all that kind of stuff.

So when you see the increase in mental health and you see that the funds aren't going there, that's a problem. It's not about saving money. It's about making sure that we direct the right amount of money into mental health to make sure that people are getting better before the ultimate thing happens, where they commit suicide.

I don't know about the rest of Toronto, but in my area today, our police officers are spending just as much time with mental health patients in the hospitals as they are doing their jobs out on the street. It's about resources.

Rather than going there and saying, "Well, you know, my financial background is that I'll find ways to cut"—we don't need cuts. What we need you to do is go there and say, "Look, we have a problem in the province of Ontario. I believe I'm going to be a good advocate for it. I'm going to speak up on it. And we need more resources." That's what I hope you do when you get on the committee. It's everywhere, and it's terrible to watch. It's terrible for the families, terrible for the communities. That's what I'd like you to do.

0920

Changing your thing—"I'll find a few bucks here"—we need more money into mental health, and I hope you—

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I totally agree with you. I am not too far from the Niagara region that you represent, Mr. Gates, and two of my close social friends are psychiatrists in that area as well. One is a child psychiatrist, to the same issue which you just mentioned. When we socially meet, he always talks about increasing youth and teens and everybody getting into the situation and there not being enough help and not enough resources. I understand that. This gentleman, the child psychiatrist, is 71 years old, and he's still practising because there's nobody to replace him.

So I know the situation. I share your concern, no doubt about it. But I didn't mean that, because of my financial background, I'll find ways to cut—

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, I understand what you're saying. You aren't looking at cuts; you're trying to move the money a bit.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Absolutely, but in the sense—

Mr. Wayne Gates: But my point is that that's not what we need in mental health. We need resources, we need—

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Yes, but I'll also be an advocate to find more resources, to have a positive impact on the needs we have in the area, for sure.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And to your son's problem, we should take a serious look in Canada—not just in Ontario—into honouring credentials from around the world to alleviate some of our problems when it comes to having enough doctors in the province of Ontario.

When medically assisted dying becomes law in Canada, it seems reasonable that the Consent and Capacity Board will be considered as a possible place for decisions surrounding that issue to be made. Do you believe the

CCB would be able to consider those cases, and do you believe the CCB should be asked to consider those cases?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: I would say that the CCB is here not to make any legislation. Once the legislation is made, to properly implement the legislative provisions, we should be involved in a positive way.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I'm good. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much, Mr. Gates.

We are now going to turn it over to the government side. You have approximately six minutes left. Ms. Mangat.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Welcome, Mr. Ananth, to Queen's Park. As my colleague said, you have a strong background in finance and business. You talked about the CIF, the Canada India Foundation, in your presentation, and that you have been working with them. My understanding is that it's a non-partisan organization. Is that correct?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Absolutely.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Were you involved when the CIF coordinated and executed bilateral projects between Ontario and Canada in health care, energy and infrastructure?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Yes.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: You were. Okay, that's great.

Your resumé shows that you're quite a bit involved in the community. All of that work in the community—as president with SV Hindu Heritage and Cultural Centre of Hamilton and vice-chair with the Immigrant Culture and Art Association of Hamilton—is all volunteer work, including the CIF work?

Mr. Nithy Ananth: It's all volunteer work.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Oh, good. That's impressive. Keep up that good volunteer work. We all know that volunteers are our unsung heroes, but they are the backbone of Canadian society. Good work. Keep up the good work. I'm proud of you.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any further questions from the government side? No further questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Ananth. You may now step down. This concludes the time allotted for the interview, given that there are no more questions. We will consider the concurrences following the interviews, if you want to stick around.

Mr. Nithy Ananth: Thank you, Madam Chair.

MR. GEORGE COOKE

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party and third party: Mr. George Cooke, intended appointee as part-time member and chair, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Our next intended appointee is Mr. George Cooke, nominated as part-time member and chair, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. Good

morning, Mr. Cooke. Thank you very much for being here. You may take your seat—you've done that already. You may begin with a brief statement, if you wish. Members of each party will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time used for your statement will be declared from the government side. Once we do begin questions, it will begin with the third party. Welcome, Mr. Cooke.

Mr. George Cooke: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here this morning. My understanding is that you have a copy of my resumé, but that it does not necessarily find its way into Hansard unless I otherwise put it there. So please allow me for a few moments to just highlight what I think is some of the relevant experience that I bring to this position.

You will have noted in that resume that I spent the largest part of my career perhaps—almost 21 years—as the CEO of a large Canadian insurance company, the Dominion of Canada General Insurance Co., as it then was. In addition to that, which may not be as clear, I was a public servant for approximately 10 and a half years prior to that, coming somewhat after my graduation from Queen's where I did an undergrad degree in political studies and then subsequently a master's in business administration. The point is that through the career, in terms of the various positions I held, I actually worked both in government and in the private sector.

When I turned 60, I retired from corporate life with the express purpose of sitting on a number of boards. That was an interest that had developed along the way. The list is extensive, but I have served on public corporate boards, private corporate boards and not-for-profit organizations. Over that period of time, I find myself in my—I call it my retirement, but my wife suggested I've received an F for retirement. I am currently the board chair at OMERS, which is a large, jointly sponsored pension plan; I sit on the board of Hydro One; I currently chair an organization called CANATICS, which is an organization that deals with the identification of potential insurance fraud—it was owned by nine and is now owned by seven large private insurers in the province—and I'm very interested in pursuing this particular nomination to OLG.

Along the way, however, I've served on boards of SEC registrants, with the corresponding requirement of a certain level of financial acumen. I've served on hospital boards. I've served on not-for-profits. I volunteer for Spinal Cord Injury Ontario. I sit on an advisory committee at Queen's University. The background is reasonably varied. It's not by any stretch in all one sector, and I think that breadth of experience is particularly relevant as I contemplate something like a position with OLG.

One of the questions that you might legitimately pose, I think, is how can I do all of these things all at the same time? The simple answer is that if I am confirmed this morning, I will step away from a number of activities that I'm currently doing, such that I can undertake this role. The intent would be that I would remain as chair at OMERS; I've just been reappointed for a three-year term.

I would remain on the board of Hydro One, but I would walk away from the other time-consuming activities such that I would be able to devote an appropriate amount of time to this particular endeavour. I've thought long and hard about that and the commitment that it will mean from my perspective and from that of my family, and I'm quite prepared to undertake that because one thing that has been consistent throughout my background is a great love of public policy. There's lots of public policy caught up with this particular position, and I think I can make a positive and objective contribution in that regard.

Those are a few highlights of where I come from and what, perhaps, my qualifications are that I could bring to this particular task, and some explanation to you as to how I think I can do everything that I'm hoping to be doing over the next three to six years.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much, Mr. Cooke. We will now begin questioning with Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning, Mr. Cooke. How are you?

Mr. George Cooke: I'm very well, thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good. You were already here, I think, when I asked the last gentleman: Have you ever contributed to any political party?

Mr. George Cooke: I have. At various points in my life, I've actually contributed to all three parties, but most recently that was to the Liberal Party, which I suspect is the question.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I didn't phrase it that way.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Even the NDP? Wow.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Hey, listen, sometimes they make wise decisions. I can't control that, so—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Everybody has a weakness.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Everybody has a weakness, too, you're right. Some people actually support the Conservatives.

One thing—it's a little off the subject; I will get into your appointment here.

0930

I see you have some ties with Hydro One, so you're probably more of an expert than myself on the subject. You don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but—

Mr. George Cooke: I may not be able to.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You might not be able to. Do you have a position on selling off Hydro One?

Mr. George Cooke: I do—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Yes, Ms. Vernile.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I believe that is outside the scope of what we're here to discuss, and that is the appointment to the position of chair for the OLG. It has nothing to do with what Mr. Gates is talking about.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Ms. Vernile. Mr. Gates, I will ask that you make your questions or ask your questions related to the appointment of Mr. Cooke to the OLG. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Maybe off the record someday I'll talk to you about how, in my opinion, we shouldn't be selling it, and it may go down as the worst decision ever made by any government in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Point of order, Madam Chair: Is he on topic?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm staying on topic—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Ms. Vernile. You may continue, Mr. Gates.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Listen, do you mind going through the Chair? Will you just go through the Chair, please? Go through the Chair and I'll obey the Chair's orders. Thank you very much. It's always important—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Gates. If you can just—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Chair—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you. Mr. Gates, if you can proceed.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Because I do know that hydro rates are a concern at some of the racetracks that I represent.

The OLG has, in the recent past, done a lot of work to privatize services that were once public and, in some instances, like the Fort Erie Race Track, has simply taken away gambling without any consultation or foresight. Given the disastrous outcome of these unilateral actions, I'm curious what your position is on the continued privatization of OLG.

Mr. George Cooke: I find myself in a very interesting position to try to respond to that in that, in large measure, because of the appointment process, I have not had the opportunity to meet with OLG to fully understand what exactly the thinking is or what the logic was for actions that have been taken or may be taken in the future. So it's really impossible for me to offer you an informed view at this point on that particular question.

Trying, however, to be at least helpful in my response, I do not have a bias that is in favour of public ownership or private ownership in any particular circumstance. I think there are many ways of dealing with issues. An approach that's most practical is to, first of all, understand what the facts are, understand what the policy intent of the government is and what the direction of the corporation is. You then apply good common sense to those facts and you come up with good solutions that work, hopefully, as intended. But it's not, in my case, guided by a particular doctrine that says all things must be private or all things must be public. I think there are many ways of solving those kinds of issues.

What I would hope to bring OLG would be an appropriate level of objectivity that would hopefully lead a qualified board to make decisions that are informed and are consistent with government policy.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate your answer, but from my point of view, that particular decision, and according to our current Premier—maybe not the last one—was a mistake and the community lost 225 jobs in an area that

had high unemployment. It was more about consulting with communities on these types of things. I think that's important to do as well.

Mr. George Cooke: Let me try to give you an example from another piece of my background that may help you in that regard.

When I joined OMERS, which was just a little over three years ago, as the first independent board chair following the recommendations of Tony Dean—who had done a governance review prior to the creation of this position, when I first landed there—I actually negotiated a 90-day period with the sponsors of the corporation, such that I would be able to meet with all of them and understand their concerns. That's employers and employees and employee associations. I then also met with all of the members of both boards; it's a very complex governance structure. I took my time to go through 43 in-depth, day-long briefing sessions with management as to the types of activities the corporation was engaged in, and then I found myself in a position where I could actually have informed views as to how to proceed.

My orientation is to be very consultative. I want to reach out. I fully intend, if I occupy this particular position, to reach out to all of the affected communities, listen to and understand their concerns before I start exercising my judgement in terms of addressing them.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, so I'll give you another question around Fort Erie. In a recent announcement—that the new body would be foreign to oversee the future of horse racing in the province of Ontario. This body would, in its current proposed format, be almost entirely controlled by Woodbine Entertainment Group. That would exclude many smaller tracks and horse people, including the Fort Erie Race Track, which has the oldest track in the province and one of only two thoroughbred organizations that we have in the entire province.

Do you think it is appropriate for one individual private company to be put in charge of the entire horse racing industry in Ontario and—this is important for the Fort Erie thing, and it's why I'm asking the question—will you commit—it's a little stronger than you want to hear—to ensuring that the Fort Erie Race Track has a seat on the board of the new horse racing body in Ontario?

I think it's important. I know it's a tough question coming, but the problem that we're having is there's going to be Woodbine, which is going to oversee the thoroughbred racing. They really haven't been that supportive of Fort Erie in a lot of cases. So what we need to do is at least have a seat on the board, to at least—to your point—hear what's going on in the community: what good things they're doing, what bad things they're doing and how it can get better. It's really important for Fort Erie to have a seat at that board. That's why I asked you the question—being new on it—to understand where we're coming from for Fort Erie.

Mr. George Cooke: The only solid commitment that I can make at this point, given that I've not been involved

in these issues, is that before I do anything I will endeavour to the best of my ability to, first of all, reach out and understand, and then, two, be fully informed before I'm involved in any decision-making.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, my only purpose of that was to make sure you were aware of it, that's all. This is a very good avenue to do that, on a Tuesday morning.

Mr. George Cooke: I'm actually listening to everything you're saying and would be more than happy—if I'm cocky enough to assume that I will occupy this role, I'm quite prepared to listen to your concerns at any point.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The last question I'm going to ask is, in Niagara Falls, the city itself has voted that they'd like input into the OLG selection of a new operator for the two casinos. I don't know how familiar you are—we have the new casino and the Niagara casino. There was an article that came out just maybe a week ago or two weeks ago where they feel that there hasn't been enough openness and dialogue with the city of Niagara Falls. I just want to kind of put that on your radar as well. The deadline, I believe, for the RFPQ is—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You have just over a minute.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. It will only take me that.

I believe it's December 31. So I just wanted to give you a heads-up on that. I'm not sure how this process goes and how quickly you'd be appointed to the board but, again, that's another thing that may be on your radar—it would be to take a look at the Niagara Falls situation because it's extremely big for Niagara Falls, but it's a big issue for all of Ontario.

Mr. George Cooke: I have been reading the newspapers. That's the only source of information that I have with respect to that issue at this point. I actually do not know when those decisions will be taken. I understand that there was a meeting of the OLG board within the last couple of weeks. There's another one next week.

I am, again, in a state of limbo, not being able to inform myself of those matters until such time as this process is through. But to the extent that I am able to be informed and involved prior to those decisions being taken, I will more than willingly commit to understanding what I'm doing. I think that's the point that I was trying to make earlier. I bring, I think, a—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Cooke. We are now going to pass the questioning on to the government side. Mr. Colle, you have about five minutes.

Mr. Mike Colle: Welcome, George.

Mr. George Cooke: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Colle: I guess I could ask you a question about Diamond and Diamond, perhaps, but I think that would be ruled out of order.

Mr. George Cooke: I've never been a supporter.

Mr. Mike Colle: Our Porsche-driving slip-and-fall lawyers—or Maserati-driving.

Anyway, one question that I have is about OLG's inability sometimes to inform the public about what they

do with the revenues and money they get from gaming. I know they run a lot of ads about, “You can play. You can win.” I just heard one yesterday about how you can buy a yacht and buy something offshore somewhere.

0940

Are there ways of better informing people of where some of the revenues go so that people at least know, if they are gaming, that some of the money is going back to—whether it’s hospitals or certain social programs. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. George Cooke: My understanding is that OLG is transferring something in the order of \$2 billion to \$2.2 billion a year to the government of Ontario, and those funds are subsequently committed to a variety of causes, some of which you’ve identified.

From a personal perspective, I would like to see as much transparency around the use of those funds as is permitted by government. I suspect the answer—and I do not know this—is that ultimately the level of disclosure around how those funds are utilized rests with the government. My bias would be, within the bounds that are permitted to me and the corporation, to be as transparent as possible. My inclination would be to encourage the government to be as transparent as possible, because I personally think it’s very important for the public to understand exactly what the impacts of this very significant operation are in terms of the broader funding of public programs. I am aware, from what I’ve been able to read—again, that’s publicly available—that a significant contribution goes to the Ministry of Health to deal with issues of responsible gambling and related medical aspects. That’s significant, but again, the principle there would be as much transparency as possible.

Mr. Mike Colle: Don’t you think it would also be helpful if somehow, whether it be OLG or the government, to explore the opportunities whereby—let’s say you’re talking about Fort Erie or you’re talking about St. Catharines or you’re talking about Toronto or wherever there are gaming facilities. Maybe some of the revenues could go towards local non-profit organizations that help people in that community. As you know, these small groups—I’m not talking about the major organizations, but the small church organizations, the local hospice. If they were connected somehow with some of these revenues, I think the public would feel better about the necessary evil of gaming: It’s there, but at least the local John Howard Society is getting some dollars to help people who are having problems with the law.

Mr. George Cooke: I have to imagine that some of these matters have been dealt with prior to this point in time. I don’t know what the reasoning was for either disclosing or not disclosing—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): One minute left.

Mr. George Cooke: —or directing or not directing. I can simply say to you that I personally bring a bias that supports disclosure within the bounds that are permitted. I also am very interested in the much broader economic development impacts associated with these kinds of activities. Philosophically, we are not in different spaces.

Practically, I don’t know what I can commit to until I get there.

Mr. Mike Colle: I think that no matter what we assume, the public has to be reminded. Originally, this was the agreement made: Gaming revenues would go to help health care and other government issues. I think more has to be done to get back to educating and informing people about the revenues and what happens to them and what the purpose of some of these revenues are. That would be something we should re-emphasize, because I think over the years, we’ve just said, “Oh, well. OLG and 6/49—whatever.” I think we are too casual about it, and we’ve got to remind people—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much, Mr. Colle. We’re going to pass it over now to Mr. Cho.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Good morning.

Mr. George Cooke: Good morning.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I noticed that Mr. Cooke and myself have some similarities, in that you’ve been in all three parties and so have I. When I was young and very idealistic but a bit naive, I was in the NDP. Then I joined the Liberals, but the Liberals kicked me out because I ran independently against a Liberal MP. I noticed the Liberals are very self-centred; the party comes before Ontarians. Finally, I joined the most mature and responsible party, the PC Party—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Point of order, Madam Chair: What does this have to do with why we’re here?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. Cho, if you can please ask your questions to Mr. Cooke.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay, I’ll ask the questions.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I’ve only been an MPP for three months, so I’m on a very long learning curve, and sometimes I get a bit confused. On one side, the third party says that selling Ontario Hydro will make the hydro bills go up. The Liberals say that it’s a good thing. The PCs say, “Never sell Hydro One, especially as a fire sale.”

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Yes, Ms. Vernile?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: We’re here to talk about an appointment to the OLG; we’re not here to talk about Hydro. So could we please stay on topic, respectfully?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think he has a history with Hydro One, so that’s a concern—

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I’d only like to get the other view. What kind of person—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): So let’s ask your question, Mr. Cho.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: —is coming to the OLG? I’d like to continue.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Ask your question, and we’ll make a judgment after. Go ahead.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you, Madam Chair. So what is your view on selling Hydro One? That hydro bills will go up?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Chair—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Excuse me, Mr. Cho. I ask you kindly to stick to the questions at hand, which should be related to Mr. Cooke's appointment to the OLG. Thank you very much, Mr. Cho.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay. Now—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Madam Chair?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. McDonell?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I think I've heard enough from Ms. Vernile here—the criticism. She's not the Chair. If she wants to take a position, that's okay; if not, I guess we'd expect her to have some respect.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I am Vice-Chair.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: She's actually Vice-Chair, by the way.

Mr. Jim McDonell: She's not in the Chair's spot, though.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): I've asked Mr. Cho to please continue his questioning of Mr. Cooke as it relates to his appointment to the OLG. Thank you very much.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Okay. I think in your presentation you did mention that you were going to reduce your responsibilities while sitting on Hydro One, and then you'll become chair of the OLG. Now, Hydro One is for sale, it looks like. Do you think that you would see OLG as a good thing to become privatized?

Mr. George Cooke: Let me be clear about my earlier comment. My intention is to retain my position as chair at OMERS, retain my position as a director of Hydro One and hopefully become the chair of OLG. What I intend to back away from are the other activities. I would resign from the board and chair position of CANATICS.

In addition to those things, I had been involved with some small consulting projects—and a very large consulting project, actually, that was done over the last 18 months or so related to financial services regulation here in Ontario. It was a project that I undertook for the Minister of Finance. I would not be doing those sorts of things if I assumed this role.

The three boards would more than occupy a reasonable part of my workweek—which incidentally, for me, is seven days, not five. I just wanted to be clear in terms of what I would be doing and not doing. There's no intention whatsoever from me to back away from Hydro One.

As to the issue of privatization versus public ownership, it's complicated. My personal view is that the right outcome is very much dependent on the circumstances and the facts where you're applying the logic. There's no doctrinaire belief on my part that everything should be privatized or everything should be publicly owned. The facts of the circumstance will dictate what the right approach is. And I think I've made it very clear that I very much hope to continue my appointment with Hydro One as it is currently embarked on its path.

0950

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I have one more question. This question was prepared by our staff. I think it's a relevant one. You served as a director of Hydro One, hardly a shining beacon of transparency or good practices—

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Ms. Vernile, I'm going to ask that he just ask his question, and we'll make a judgment.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Hold on. The Clerk has suggested I take the point of order.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Once again, we see a member of the opposition asking a question about Hydro One. That's not why we're here. That's outside the scope of mandate.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Chair, with the experience at Hydro One, I think some of the biases he may have are important here. We're not talking about somebody who just stepped out of childhood. He has a lot of good experience. I think the questions are on point.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. Cho, I'm going to ask that you ask the question.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I will. What have you learned at Hydro One that would allow you to better clean up the OLG?

Mr. George Cooke: I've been a director of Hydro One for somewhere in the order of six years. I was initially appointed when it was fully owned by the government, and then I subsequently let my name stand for consideration, roughly a year and a quarter or a year and a half ago, when the transformation that's currently under way was taking place.

I think the types of experiences that might be most relevant to OLG would be the time served as both a director and as a committee chair of what was a wholly owned government corporation. It allows me to have actual practical experience in terms of understanding the role that the memorandum of understanding between those public corporations and the government actually plays. Also, I've been on the receiving end of policy directives, as a director, that have come forth from government, as government wanted to direct the operations that were otherwise being undertaken and felt that it was appropriate to direct vis-à-vis the mandate of that organization.

So to try to answer what I think is your question, I think my role as a director of Hydro One—that's perhaps most relevant to what OLG is at this moment in time, relating to the pre-privatization period, where it was a public corporation operating, for all intents and purposes, in the same construct vis-à-vis government that OLG is.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. McDonell?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you for coming out today. I don't know if I have to check whether I can ask these questions or not.

I see some of your experience being Hydro One and some the insurance fraud portion, two dismal areas in this province, to say the least. I think Ontario has been called

the fraud capital of the world when it comes to insurance—

Mr. George Cooke: I've used that phrase myself, actually.

Mr. Jim McDonell: We haven't seen anything to really combat that. I know that's just a reflection of the policies of this government—as Hydro One. It's interesting that you talk about your commitment to transparency, because over the last year we've had anything but when it comes to Hydro One and some of the changes that we've seen that don't allow the Auditor General to review.

As we go into OLG—a couple issues I have, locally: One is, with small businesses that are just trying to get a terminal, it seems to take years. It's almost impossible to get. There's no question that in some of these areas it's the difference between people stopping in to buy some milk while they're there or going to a place down the road. Is there any thought that opening them up more to—it is an economic benefit to these small grocery stores and corner stores, especially in rural areas, where they're closing up by the dozens. There's almost nothing left. Do you have any comment on that, as far as opportunities?

Mr. George Cooke: Again, I cannot make a comment that's based on fact because I'm not aware of the facts; I'm not there. I can tell you that—

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's more of a bias.

Mr. George Cooke: That's where I'm going. I'm going to try to help you. I grew up in a small town of about 2,400 people in northern Ontario. As much as I have lived most of my working life in Toronto, I still think of myself as a small-town kid who's living in a large city. I have a bias that is very much in favour of local communities. How that will translate into decisions that OLG might make, I guess, remains to be seen. But my bias is not an urban bias that necessarily involves centralization for the sake of centralization.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much, Mr. Cooke. That concludes our time for this interview. I'm going to ask that you step down.

We are now going to consider the concurrences. We will now move to the appointments review. Hold on one second here.

We will now consider the concurrence for Mr. Nithy Ananth, nominated as member, Consent and Capacity Board. Would someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Qaadri.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Nithy Ananth, nominated as member, Consent and Capacity Board.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Congratulations, Mr. Ananth.

We will now consider the concurrence for Mr. George Cooke, nominated as part-time member and chair, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. Would someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Qaadri.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of George Cooke, nominated as

part-time member and chair of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Is there any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Congratulations, Mr. Cooke.

Committee members, this is our last session before the House rises.

Mr. Mike Colle: No.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Yes, tell me it's not so. I know. I know, Mr. Colle.

We have to extend some deadlines. I'm going to run through a few of them, and then I'm going to ask if there is unanimous agreement to extend the deadlines.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Ram Chopra, nominated as member, council of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario? Yes. Right now, the certificate deadline expires December 18, and we're going to extend it to February 21, 2017. Yes.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Pareshkumar Jariwala, nominated as member, Grant Review Team—Essex, Kent and Lambton—Ontario Trillium Foundation? The certificate deadline expires December 18, 2016. We extend it to February 21, 2017. Yes? Perfect.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Phyllis Tanaka, nominated as member, Grant Review Team—Toronto—Ontario Trillium Foundation? The certificate deadline expires December 18, 2016. We extend it to February 21, 2017. It passes. Okay.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Jo-Anne Poirier, nominated as member, Ontario Educational Communications Authority, TVO? The certificate deadline expires December 18, 2016. We extend it to February 21, 2017. Right.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Kevin Gordon Cleghorn, nominated as member, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Social Justice Tribunals Ontario? The certificate deadline expires December 25, 2016. We extend it to February 21, 2017. Yes.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of Norma Lamont, nominated as member, Grant Review Team—Champlain—Ontario Trillium Foundation? The certificate deadline expires December 25, 2016, and we'd extend it to February 21, 2017. Yes.

Do we have unanimous agreement to extend the deadline to consider the intended appointment of William Greenhalgh, nominated as vice-chair, Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario? The certificate deadline expires December 25, 2016. We extend it to February 21, 2017. Perfect.

With all our business having been completed—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just one question.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Yes, Mr. Gates?

Mr. Wayne Gates: When are we going to be putting the list together to review agencies? I see that kind of got on the back burner. Coming in in September, we were trying to do a few and we didn't get them done. Do we need to put in a new list? Where are we at on that?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You can call a subcommittee meeting to discuss this, in which case then you can identify which agencies you'd want to review.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): And if we need that list once again—I know that we had requested the list before the House rose in the summer to get a list of which agencies had been reviewed in the last little bit—we can get that again.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes. There was a little bit of stalling. I agree with that particular—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): What was that? Sorry?

Mr. Wayne Gates: And I just want to say to all my colleagues and to staff, merry Christmas. Enjoy your holidays with your families. Spend some time with your families. Really, at the end of the day that's all that matters in life. So merry Christmas and happy new year.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Same to you.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Gates. I echo that and want to wish the committee members, everyone here today, staff of course, happy holidays and all the best for the new year.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Same to you.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): The meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1001.

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